

Eight Sermons by Dr. Martin Luther Preached at Wittenberg in Lent 1522 (Invocavit Sermons)

Treating Briefly of the Mass, Images, Both Kinds in the Sacrament, Eating of Meats, Private Confession, etc.

Translation A. Steimle

THE FIRST SERMON

INVOCAVIT SUNDAY

THE challenge of death comes to us all, and no one can die for another. Every one must fight his own battle with death by himself, alone. We can shout into one another's ears, but every one must be prepared finally to meet death alone. I will not be with you then, nor you with me. Therefore every one must know for himself the chief things in Christianity, and be armed therewith. They are the same which you, my beloved, have long ago heard from me.

In the first place, We must know that we are the children of wrath, and all our works, intentions and thoughts are nothing at all. To prove this point we must have a clear, strong text, and although there are many such in the Bible I will not overwhelm you with them, but ask you to note just this one, "We are all the children of wrath." And pray, do not boast in reply: I have builded an altar, given a foundation for masses, etc.

Secondly, That God has sent us His only-begotten Son that we may believe in Him, and whosoever will put his trust in Him, should be free from sin and a child of God, as John declares in the first chapter, "He gave them power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in his name." Here we should all be thoroughly at home in the Bible and be ready with many passages to confront the devil. In respect to these two points nothing seems to be lacking or amiss, but they have been rightly preached to you; I should be very sorry if it were otherwise. Nay, I am well aware and I dare say, that you are more learned herein than I, and that there are not only one, two, three, or four, but perhaps ten or more, who have this wisdom and enlightenment.

Thirdly, There must also be love, and through love we must do unto one another as God has done unto us through faith. For without love faith is nothing, as St. Paul says, <460201>1 Corinthians 2:1, "If I could speak with the tongues of angels, and of the highest things in faith, and have not love, I am nothing." And here, dear friends, have you not grievously failed? I see no signs of love among you, and I observe that you have not been grateful to God for His rich gifts and treasures.

Let us beware lest Wittenberg become Capernaum. I notice that you have a great deal to say of the doctrine which is preached to you, of faith and of love. This is not surprising; an ass can almost intone the lessons, and why should you not be able to repeat the doctrines and formulas? Dear friends, the kingdom of God, — and we are that kingdom, — consists not in speech or in words, but in deeds, in

works and exercises. God does not want hearers and repeaters of words, but doers and followers who exercise themselves in the faith that worketh by love. For a faith without love is not enough — rather it is not faith at all, but a counterfeit of faith, just as a face seen in a mirror is not a real face, but merely the reflection of a face.

Fourthly, We likewise need patience. For whoever has faith, trusts in God and shows love to his neighbor, practicing it day by day, must needs suffer persecution. For the devil never sleeps, and continually molests. But patience works and produces hope, which freely yields itself to God and finds solace in Him. Thus faith, by much affliction and persecution, ever increases, and is strengthened day by day. And the heart which by God's grace has received such virtues must ever be active and freely expend itself for the benefit and service of the brethren, even as it has received from God.

And here, dear friends, one must not insist upon his rights, but must see what may be useful and helpful to his brother, as St. Paul says, *Omnia mihi licent, sed non omnia expediunt*, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are expedient." We are not all equally strong in faith; some of you have a stronger faith than I. Therefore we must not look upon ourselves, or our strength, or our rank, but upon our neighbor, for God has said through Moses, "I have borne and nourished thee, even as a mother her child." How does a mother nourish her child? First, she feeds it with milk, then gruel, then eggs and soft food. If she weaned it and at once gave it the ordinary, coarse food, the child would never thrive. So we should also deal with our brother, have patience with him for a time, suffer his weakness and help him bear it; we should give him milk-food, too, as was done with us, until he likewise grows strong, and thus we do not travel heavenward alone, but bring the brethren, who are not now on our side, with us. If all mothers were to abandon their children, where would we have been? Dear brother, if you have suckled long enough, do not at once cut off the breast, but let thy brother be nourished also. I would not have gone so far as you have done, if I had been here. What you did was good, but you have gone too fast. For there are also brothers and sisters on the other side who belong to us, and must still be won.

Let me illustrate. The sun has two properties, light and heat. No king has power enough to bend or guide the light of the sun; it remains straight in the place where it shines. But the heat may be turned and guided, and yet is ever about the sun. Thus the faith must always remain pure and immovable in the heart, never wavering; but love moves and is guided, according as our neighbors may grasp it or follow us. There are some who can run, others must walk, still others can hardly creep. Therefore we must not look upon our own, but upon our brother's powers, so that he who is weak in faith, and attempts to follow the strong, may not be destroyed of the devil. Therefore, dear brethren, obey me. I have never been a destroyer, and I was also the very first whom God called to this work. Neither can I run away, but must remain as long as it pleases God. I was the first, too, to whom God revealed it, to preach His Word to you; moreover, I am sure that you have the pure Word of God.

Let us, therefore, take up this matter with fear and humility, cast ourselves at one another's feet, join hands with each other, and help one another. I will do my part, which is no more than my duty, for I love you even as I love my own soul. For here we battle now against pope or bishop, but against the devil, and do you imagine he is asleep? He sleeps not, but sees the true light rising, and to keep it from shining into his eyes he would make a flank attack — and he will succeed, if we are not on our guard. I know him well, FB51 and I hope, too, that with the help of God I am his master. But if we

yield him but an inch, we must soon look to it how we may be rid of him. Therefore all those have erred who have consented and helped to abolish the mass — in itself a good undertaking, but not accomplished in an orderly way. You say it was right according to the Scriptures. I agree, but what becomes of order? For it was done in wantonness, with no regard to proper order and with offense to your neighbor. If, beforehand, you had called upon God in earnest prayer, and had obtained the aid of the authorities, one could be certain that it had come from God. I, too, would have taken steps toward the same end if it had been a good thing to do; and if the mass were not so evil a thing, I would introduce it again. For I cannot defend your action, as I have just said. To the papists and the blockheads I could defend it, for I could say: How do you know whether it was done with good or bad intention, since the work in itself was really a good work? But I can find nothing to reply to the devil. For if on their deathbeds the devil reminds those who began this affair of texts like these, “Every plant, which My father hath not planted, shall be rooted up,” or “I have not sent them, yet they ran,” how will they be able to withstand? He will cast them into hell. But I have a weapon to brandish in the devil’s face, so that the wide world will become too small for him: I know that in spite of my reluctance I was regularly called by the Council to preach in this place. And I would that you should have the same assurance as I. You could so easily have consulted me about the matter.

I was not so far away that you could not reach me with a letter, especially since I did not interfere with you in any way. Did you want to begin something, and then leave me to shoulder the responsibility? That is more than I can undertake, and I will not do it. Here one can see that you have not the Spirit, in spite of your deep knowledge of the Scriptures. Take note of these two things, “must” and “free.” The “must” is that which necessity requires, and which must ever be unyielding; as, for instance, the faith, which I shall never permit any one to take away from me, but which I must always keep in my heart and freely confess before every one. But “free” is that in which I have choice, and may use or not, yet in such wise that it profit my brother and not me. Now do not make a “must” out of what is “free,” as you have done, so that you may not be called to account for those who were led astray by your exercise of liberty without love. For if you entice any one to eat meat on Friday, and he is troubled about it on his deathbed, and thinks, Woe is me, for I have eaten meat and I am lost! God will call you to account for that soul. I would like to begin many things, in which but few would follow me; but what is the use? I know that those who have begun this thing, when it comes to the point, cannot maintain themselves, and will be the first to retreat. How would it be, if I brought the people to the point of attack, and though I had been the foremost to exhort others, I would then flee, and not face death with courage? How the poor people would be deceived!

Let us, therefore, feed others also with the milk which we received, until they, too, become strong in the faith. For there are many who are otherwise in accord with us and who would also gladly accept this one thing, but they do not yet fully understand it — all such we drive away. Therefore, let us show love to our neighbors, or our work will not endure. We must have patience with them for a time, and not cast out him who is weak in the faith; much more should we regulate our doing and our not doing according to the demands of love, provided no injury is done to our faith. If we do not earnestly pray to God, and act circumspectly in this matter, the thing looks to me as if all the misery which we have begun to cause the papists will fall upon us. Therefore I could no longer remain away, but was compelled to come and say these things to you.

This is enough about the mass; tomorrow we shall treat of the images.

THE SECOND SERMON

MONDAY AFTER INVOCAVIT

Dear Friends: You heard yesterday the characteristics of a Christian man, how his whole life is faith and love. Faith is directed toward God, love toward man and one's neighbor, and consists in such love and service for him as we have received from God without our work and merit. Thus there are two things: the one, which is the most needful, and which must be done in one way and no other; the other, which is a matter of choice and not of necessity, which may be kept or not, without endangering faith or incurring hell. In both, love must deal with our neighbor in the same manner as God has dealt with us; it must walk the straight road, straying neither to the left nor to the right. In the things which are "musts" and are matters of necessity, such as believing in Christ, love nevertheless never uses force or undue constraint. Thus the mass is an evil thing, and God is displeased with it, because it is performed as a sacrifice and work of merit. Therefore it must be abolished. Here there is no room for question, just as little as if you should ask whether you should pray to God. Here we are entirely agreed: the private mass must be abolished, as I have said in my writings. FB53 And I heartily wish it would be abolished everywhere and only the evangelical mass for all the people be retained. Yet Christian love should not employ harshness here nor force the matter. It should be preached and taught with tongue and pen, that to hold mass in such a manner is a sin, but no one should be dragged away from it by force. The matter should be left to God; His word should do the work alone, without our work. Why? Because it is not in my power to fashion the hearts of men as the potter moulds the clay, and to do with them as I please. I can get no farther than to men's ears; their hearts I cannot reach. And since I cannot pour faith into their hearts, I cannot, nor should I, force any one to have faith. That is God's work alone, who causes faith to live in the heart. Therefore we should give free course to the Word, and not add our works to it. We have the jus verbi, FB54 but not the executio; FB55 we should preach the Word, but the consequences must be left to God's own good pleasure.

Now if I should rush in and abolish the mass by force, there are many who would be compelled to consent to it and yet not know their own minds, but say: I do not know if it is right or wrong, I do not know where I stand, I was compelled by force to submit to the majority. And this fording and commanding results in a mere mockery, an external show, a fool's play, man-made ordinances, sham-saints and hypocrites. For where the heart is not good, I care nothing at all for the work. We must first win the hearts of the people. And that is done when I teach only the Word of God, preach the Gospel and say: "Dear lords or pastors, desist from holding the mass, it is not right, you are sinning when you do it; I cannot refrain from telling you this." But I would not make it an ordinance for them, nor urge a general law; he who would follow me could do so, and he who refused would remain without. In the latter case the Word would sink into the heart and perform its work. Thus he would become convinced and acknowledge his error, and fall away from the mass; to-morrow another would do the same, and thus God would accomplish more with His Word than if you and I would forge into one all power and authority. For if you have won the heart, you have won the whole man — and the mass must finally fall of its own weight and come to an end. And if the hearts and minds of all men are united in the purpose — abolish the mass; but if all are not heart and soul for its abolishment — leave it in God's hands, I beseech you, otherwise the result will not be good. Not, indeed, that I would again set up the mass; I let it lie in God's name. Faith must not be chained and imprisoned, nor bound by an ordinance to any work. This is the principle by which you must be

governed. For I am sure you will not be able to carry out your plans, and if you should carry them out with such general laws, then I will recant all the things that I have written and preached, and I will not support you, and therefore I ask you plainly: What harm can the mass do to you? You have your faith, pure and strong, toward God, and the mass cannot hurt you.

Love, therefore, demands that you have compassion on the weak, as all the apostles had. Once, when Paul came to Athens, a mighty city, he found in the temple many altars, and he went from one to the other and looked at them all, but did not touch any one of them even with his foot. But he stood in the midst of the market-place and said they were all idolatrous works, and begged the people to forsake them; yet he did not destroy one of them by force. When the word took hold of their hearts, they forsook their idols of their own accord, and in consequence idolatry fell of itself. Now, if I had seen that they held mass, I would have preached and admonished them concerning it. Had they heeded my admonition, they would have been won; if not, I would nevertheless not have torn them from it by the hair or employed any force, but simply allowed the Word to act, while I prayed for them. For the Word created heaven and earth and all things; the Word must do this thing, and not we poor sinners.

In conclusion: I will preach it, teach it, write it, but I will constrain no man by force, for faith must come freely without compulsion. Take myself as an example. I have opposed the indulgences and all the papists, but never by force. I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And then while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my philip FB56 and with Amsdoff, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy, that never a prince or emperor inflicted such damage upon it. I did nothing; the Word did it all. Had I desired to foment trouble, I could have brought great bloodshed upon Germany. Yea, I could have started such a little game at Worms that even the emperor would not have been safe. But what would it have been? A fool's play. I did nothing; I left it to the Word. What do you suppose is Satan's thought, when an effort is made to do things by violence? He sits back in hell and thinks: How fine a game these fools will make for me! But it brings him distress when we only spread the Word, and let it alone do the work. For it is almighty and takes captive the hearts, and if the hearts are captured the evil work will fall of itself. Let me cite and instance. Aforetime there were sects, too, Jewish and Gentile Christians, differing on the law of Moses in respect to circumcision. The former would keep it, the latter not. Then came Paul and preached that it might be kept or not, it mattered not one way or the other; they should make no "must" of it, but leave it to the choice of the individual; to keep it or not, was immaterial. Later came Jerome, who would have made a "must" out of it, and wanted laws and ordinances to prohibit it. Then came St. Augustine, who held to the opinion of St. Paul: it might be kept or not, as one wished; St. Jerome had missed the meaning of St. Paul by a hundred miles. The two doctors bumped heads rather hard over the proposition. But when St. Augustine died, St. Jerome accomplished his purpose. After that came the popes; they would add something of their own, and they, too, made laws. Thus out of the making of one law grew a thousand laws, until they have completely buried us under laws. And so it will be here; one law will soon make two, two will increase to three, and so forth.

Let this be enough at this time concerning the things that are necessary, and let us beware lest we lead astray those of weak conscience.

THE THIRD SERMON

TUESDAY AFTER INVOCAVIT

We have heard the things most necessary in Christian life, and what is a necessary result, namely, the doing away with the private mass. For the works which are necessary are those which God has either commanded or forbidden, according to the appointment of the Majesty on high. But no one shall be dragged to them by the hair, or kept from them by force, for I can drive no man to heaven with a club. I said this plainly enough, and I believe you understood what I said.

We shall now consider the things that are not matters of necessity, but are left to our free choice by God, and which we may keep or not; for instance, whether one shall marry or not, or whether monks and nuns shall leave the cloisters. These things are matters of choice and must not be forbidden by any one, and if they are forbidden, the forbidding is wrong, since it is contrary to God's appointment. In the things that are free, such as being married or remaining single, you should do on this wise: If you can restrain yourself without burdening your conscience thereby, do so by all means, but there must be no general law, and every one shall be perfectly free. Any priest, monk or nun who cannot restrain the desires of the flesh, should marry, and thus relieve the burden of conscience. But see to it that you be well-armed and fortified, so that you can stand before God and the world when you are assailed, and especially when the devil attacks you in the hour of death. It is not enough to say: This man or that has done the same, I followed the example of the crowd, according to the preaching of the provost, FB58 or Dr. Carlstadt, FB59 or Gabriel, or Michael. FB60 Not so, but every one must stand on his own feet and be prepared to give battle to the devil. You must rest upon a strong and clear text of Scripture if you would stand the test. If you cannot do that, you will never withstand, — the devil will pluck you like a withered leaf. Therefore the priests who have taken wives, and the nuns who have taken husbands, in order to save their consciences must stand squarely upon a clear text of Scripture, such as this one by St. Paul — although there are many more: "In the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils (methinks Paul uses plain language here!) forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created." This text the devil shall not overthrow nor devour, it shall rather overthrow and devour him. Therefore any monk or nun who is too weak to keep the vow of chastity, should conscientiously examine himself; if heart and conscience are strong, so that he can defend himself with a good conscience, let him marry. Would to God all monks and nuns could hear this sermon and properly understood this matter and would all forsake the cloisters and thus all the cloisters in the world cease to exist — this is my earnest desire. But now they have no understanding of the matter (for no one preaches it to them), and hearing that in other places many are leaving the cloisters, who however are well-prepared for such a step, they would follow their example, but have not yet fortified their consciences and do not know that it is a matter of liberty. This is bad, although it is better that the evil should be outside than inside. FB61 Therefore I say, what God has made free shall remain free, and you must not obey if some one forbids it, even as the pope has done, the Antichrist. He who can do so without harm and for love of his neighbor, may wear a cowl or a tonsure, since it will not injure his faith; wearing a cowl will not kill him.

Thus, dear friends, it is plain enough, and I believe you ought to understand it and not make liberty a law, saying: This priest has taken a wife, therefore all priests must take wives. Not at all. Or this monk or that nun has left the cloister, therefore they must all come out. Not at all. Or this man has broken the images and burnt them, therefore all images must be burned — not at all, dear brother! And

again, this priest has no wife, therefore no priest dare marry. Not at all! They who cannot retain their chastity should take wives, and for others who can be chaste, it is good that they restrain themselves, as those who live in the spirit and not in the flesh. Neither should they be troubled about the vows they have made, such as the monks' vows of obedience, chastity and poverty (though they are rich enough withal). For we cannot vow anything that is contrary to God's commands. God has made it a matter of liberty to marry or not to marry, and thou fool under-takest to turn this liberty into a vow against the ordinance of God? Therefore you must leave liberty alone and not make a compulsion out of it; your vow is contrary to God's liberty. Suppose I should vow to strike my father on the mouth, or to steal some one's property, do you believe God would be pleased with such a vow? And as little as I ought to keep a vow to strike my father on the mouth, so little ought I to abstain from marriage because I am bound by a vow of chastity, for in both cases God has ordered it otherwise. God has ordained that I should be free to eat fish or flesh, and there should be no commandment concerning them. Therefore all the Carthusians FB62 and all monks and nuns forsake the ordinance and liberty which God has given when they believe that if they eat meat they are defiled.

But we must come to the images, and concerning them also it is true that they are unnecessary, and we are free to have them or not, although it would be much better if we did not have them. I am not partial to them. A great controversy arose on the subject of images between the Roman emperor and the pope; the emperor held that he had the authority to banish the images, but the pope insisted that they should remain, and both were wrong. Much blood was shed, but the pope emerged as victor and the emperor lost. FB63 What was it all about? They wished to make a "must" out of that which is free, and that God cannot tolerate. Do you wish to change the ordering of the Majesty on high? Not so; you will not do any such thing. You read in the Law, <022004>Exodus 20:4, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth." There you take your stand; that is your ground. Now let us see! When our adversaries shall say: The first commandment aims at this, that we should worship one God alone and not any image, even as it is said immediately following, "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them," and declare that the worship of images is forbidden and not the making of them, they disturb and unsettle our foundation for us. And if you reply: The text says, "Thou shalt not make any images," They answer: It also says, "Thou shalt not worship them." In the face of such uncertainty who would be so bold as to destroy the images? Not I. But let us go farther. They say: Did not Noah, Abraham, Jacob build altars? And who will deny that? We must admit it. Again, did not Moses erect a brazen serpent, as we read in his fourth book? How can you say Moses forbids the making of images when he himself makes one? It seems to me, such a serpent is an image, too. How shall we answer that? Again, do we not read that two birds were erected on the mercy-seat, the very place where God willed that He should be worshiped? Here we must admit, that we may make images and have images, but we must not worship them, and when they are worshiped, they should be put away and destroyed, just as King Hezekiah brake in pieces the serpent erected by Moses. And who will be so bold as to say, when called to account: They worship the images. They will answer: Art thou the man who dares to accuse us of worshipping the images? Do not believe that they will acknowledge it. To be sure it is true, but we cannot make them admit it. Remember how they acted when I condemned works without faith. They said: Do you believe that we have no faith, or that our works are performed without faith? I can do nothing more than put my flute back in its pocket; give them a hair's breadth, and they take a hundred miles.

Therefore it should have been preached that images were nothing and that God is not served by their erection, and they would have fallen of themselves. That is what I did; that is what Paul did in Athens, when he went into their churches and saw all their idols. He did not strike at any of them, but stood in the market-place and said, "Ye men of Athens, ye are all idolatrous." He preached against their idols, but he overthrew none by force. And you would rush in, create an uproar, break down the altars and overthrow the images? Do you really believe you can abolish the images on this wise? Nay, you will only set them up more firmly. Even if you overthrew the images in this place, do you think you have overthrown those in Nuremberg and the rest of the world? Not at all. St. Paul, as we read in the Book of Acts, sat in a ship on whose prow were painted or carved the Twin Brothers. FB65 He went on board and did not bother about it at all, neither did he break them off. Why must Luke describe the Twins at this place? Without doubt he wanted to show that outward things could do no harm to faith, if only the heart does not deave to them nor put its trust in them. This is what we must preach and teach, and let the Word alone do the work, as I said before. The Word must first capture the hearts of men and enlighten them, — we cannot do it. Therefore the apostles gloried in their service, ministerium, and not in its effect, executio.

We will let this be enough for to-day, and pray God for His grace.

THE FOURTH SERMON

WEDNESDAY AFTER INVOCAVIT

Dear Friends: We have heard the things which are necessary, as for instance, that the mass is regarded as a sacrifice. FB66 Then we considered the things which are left to our liberty, such as marriage, the monastic life, the abolishing of images. We have treated these four subjects, and have said that in all these matters love is the captain. On the subject of images, in particular, we saw that they ought to be abolished if they are going to be worshipped, otherwise not, although I wish they were abolished everywhere because they are abused,—it is useless to deny it. For whoever places an image in a church, imagines he has performed a service unto God and a good work, which is downright idolatry. And this, the greatest, foremost and highest reason for abolishing the images, you have neglected, and taken up the very lowest. For I suppose there is scarcely any man who does not understand that yonder crucifix is not my God, for my God is in heaven, but that this is simply a sign. But the world is full of the other abuse, for who would place an image of silver or of wood in a church, if he did not think that in so doing he was doing God a service? Think you that Duke Frederick, the bishop of Halle, and the others would have placed so many silver images in the churches, if they thought it counted nothing before God? Nay, they would not do it. But this is not sufficient reason to abolish, destroy and burn all the images; and why? Because we must admit that there are still people who have not the wrong opinion of them, but to whom they may be useful. Although they are few, yet we cannot and should not condemn anything which is still useful to the devotions of any man. But you should have taught that images are nothing, God cares nothing for them, and that He is not served, nor pleased when we make an image for Him, but that we would do better to give a poor man a goldpiece than to give God a golden image, for God has forbidden the latter, but not the former. If they had heard this teaching, that images count for nothing, they would have ceased of their own accord, and the images would have fallen without any uproar or tumult, even as it was already coming to pass.

We must, therefore, be on our guard, for the devil is after us, through his apostles, with all his craft and cunning. Now, although it is true, and no one can deny that the images are evil because they are abused, nevertheless we must not on that account reject them, nor condemn anything because it is abused. That would result in utter confusion. God has commanded us not to lift up our eyes unto the sun, etc., that we may not worship them, for they are created to serve all nations.

(<050419>Deuteronomy 4:19) But there are many people who worship the sun and the stars. Shall we, therefore, essay to pull the sun and stars from the skies? Nay, we will not do it. Again, wine and women bring many a man to misery and make a fool of him. Shall we, therefore, kill all the women and pour out all the wine? Again, gold and silver cause much evil, shall we, therefore, condemn them? Nay, if we would drive away our one worst enemy, who does us the most harm, we would have to kill ourselves, for we have no greater enemy than our own heart, even as Jeremiah says, "The heart of man is crooked," or, as I take the meaning, "always twisting to one side or the other." (<241709>Jeremiah 17:9) And what good would that do us?

He who would blacken the devil must have good charcoal, for he, too, wears fine clothes and goes to the fair. But I can catch him by asking him: Do you not place the images in the churches because you think it a special service of God? and when he says Yes, as he must, you may conclude that what was meant as a service of God he has turned into idolatry by abusing the images; he eagerly sought what God has not commanded and neglected God's positive command, to help the neighbor. But I have not yet caught him; he escapes me by saying: I help the poor, too; cannot I give to my neighbor and at the same time place images in churches? That is not true, -for who would not rather give his neighbor a gold-piece, than God a golden image! Nay, he would not trouble himself about placing images in churches if he believed that God was not served thereby. Therefore I freely admit, images are neither here nor there, neither evil nor good, we may have them or not, as we please. This trouble has been caused by you; the devil would not have accomplished it with me, for I cannot deny that it is possible to find some one to whom images are useful. And if I were asked about it, I would confess that none of these things give offense to me, and if just one man were found upon earth who used the images aright, the devil would soon draw the conclusion against me: Why condemnest thou that which is still useful in worship? This challenge I could not answer; he would have successfully defied me. He would not have got nearly so far if I had been here. He played a bold game, and won, although it does no harm to the Word of God. You wanted to paint the devil black, but forgot the charcoal and used chalk. If you would fight the devil, you must be well versed in the Scriptures, and, besides, use them at the right time.

Let us proceed and speak of the eating of meats. It is true that we are free to eat any manner of food, meats, fish, eggs or butter. This no one can deny. God has given us this liberty. That is true; nevertheless we must know how to use our liberty, and treat the weak brother differently from the stubborn. Observe, then, how you must use this liberty.

First of all, If you cannot give up meat without harm to yourself, or if you are sick, you may eat whatever you like, and if any one takes offense, let him be offended. And if the whole world took offense, yet you are not committing a sin, for God can excuse you in view of the liberty He has so graciously bestowed upon you, and of the necessities of your health, which would be endangered by your abstinence.

Secondly, If you should be pressed to eat fish instead of meat on Friday, and to eat fish and abstain from eggs and butter during Lent, etc., as the pope has done with his fools' laws, then you must in no wise allow yourself to be drawn away from the liberty in which God has placed you, but do just the contrary to spite him, and say: Because you forbid me to eat meat, and presume to turn my liberty into law, I will eat meat in spite of you. (Liberty and Law) And thus you must do in all other things which are matters of liberty. To give you an example: If the pope, or any one else would force me to wear a cowl, just as he prescribes it, I would take off the cowl just to spite him. But since it is left to my own free choice, I wear it or take it off, according to my pleasure.

Thirdly, There are some who are still weak in faith, who ought to be instructed, and who would gladly believe as we do. But their ignorance prevents them, and if this were faithfully preached to them, as it was to us, they would be one with us. Toward such well-meaning people we must assume an entirely different attitude from that which we assume toward the stubborn. We must bear patiently with them and not use our liberty, since it brings no peril or harm to body or soul, nay, rather is salutary, and we are doing our brothers and sisters a great service besides. But if we use our liberty without need, and deliberately cause offense to our neighbor, we drive away the very one who in time would come to our faith. Thus St. Paul circumcised Timothy because simple-minded Jews had taken offense; he thought, What harm can it do, since they are offended because of their ignorance? (<441603>Acts 16:3) But when, in Antioch, they would insist that he ought and must circumcise Titus, Paul withstood them all and to spite them would not have Titus circumcised. (<480203>Galatians 2:3) And he held his ground. He did the same when St. Peter by the exercise of his liberty caused a wrong conception in the minds of the unlearned. (<480211>Galatians 2:11 ff.) It was on this wise: When Peter was with the Gentiles, he ate pork and sausage with them, but when the Jews came in, he would not touch this food and ate no more with them. (Peter and the Gentiles) Then the Gentiles who had become Christians, thought: Alas! we, too, must be like the Jews, eat no pork and live according to the law of Moses. But when Paul found that it would injure the liberty of the Gospel, he reprov'd Peter publicly and read him an apostolic lecture, saying: "If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" (<480214>Galatians 2:14) Thus we, too, should order our lives and use our liberty at the proper time, so that Christian liberty may suffer no injury, and no offense be given to our weak brothers and sisters who are still without the knowledge of this liberty.

THE FIFTH SERMON

A SERMON ON THE SACRAMENT THURSDAY AFTER INVOCAVIT

We have heard of the things that are necessary, such as the mass, which is regarded as a sacrifice, and of the unnecessary things, such as the leaving of monasteries by monks, the marriage of priests, and the images. We have seen how we must treat these matters, that no compulsion, or law must be made of them, and that no one shall be dragged from them by the hair, but that we must let the Word of God alone do the work. Let us now consider how we must observe the blessed sacrament.

You have heard how I preached against the foolish law of the pope and opposed his precept, that no woman shall wash the altar-linen on which the body of Christ has lain, even if it be a pure nun, except it first be washed by a pure priest. Likewise, when any one touches the body of Christ with the hand, the priests come running and scrape his fingers, and much more of the same sort. But when a

priest is incontinent, the pope winks at it. If the woman bears a child, he lets that pass, too. The altar-linen and the sacrament, however, dare not be touched.

Against such fools' laws we have preached, and set forth that no sin is involved in these foolish prescriptions of the pope:, and that a layman does not commit sin if he touch the cup or the body of Christ with his hands. You should give thanks to God that you have: come to such clear knowledge, which many great men have lacked. But now you have become just as foolish as the pope, with your notion that you must handle the sacrament; you would prove that you are good Christians by touching the sacrament with your hands. You have dealt with the sacrament, our highest treasure, in such a way that it is a wonder you were not struck down by thunder and lightning. The other things God would have suffered you to do, but to make this a matter of compulsion, He can in no wise tolerate. And if you do not recede from this, neither the emperor nor any one else need drive me from you, I will go without urging; yea, I dare say, none of my enemies, although they have caused me much sorrow, have wounded me as you have wounded me in this matter. If you would show that you are good Christians by handling the sacrament, and boast of it before everybody, then indeed Herod and Pilate are the chief and best Christians. Methinks they handled the body of Christ when they had him nailed to the cross and put to death.

Nay, my dear friends, the kingdom of God consists not in outward things, which can be touched or perceived, but in faith. (<421720>Luke 17:20 <460420>1 Corinthians 4:20) But you may say: We live and should live in accordance with the Scriptures, and God has instituted the sacrament in such a manner that we should take it with our hands, for He said: "Take and eat, 'this is my body.'" (<402636>Matthew 26:36) Answer: Though I am convinced beyond a doubt that the disciples of the Lord took it with their hands, and though I admit that you may do the same without committing sin, nevertheless I can neither make it compulsory nor prove that it is the only way. And my reason therefore is this: when the devil, in his seeking after us, argues, Where have you read in the Scriptures that "take" means "seizing with the hands"? — how shall I prove or defend it? (What does "Take" mean?) Nay, how will I answer him when he cites, from the Scriptures, the very opposite, and proves that "take" does not mean to receive with the hands only, but also to convey to ourselves in other ways? "See, my good fellow," so he says, "how the word 'take' is used by three Evangelists in describing the taking of gall and vinegar by the Lord. (<402734>Matthew 27:34 <411523>Mark 15:23) You must admit that the Lord did not touch or handle it with His hands, for His hands were nailed to the cross." (<422336>Luke 23:36) This verse is a strong argument against me. Again, he cites the passage: Et accepit omnes timor , — "And fear took hold on all," where again we must admit that fear has no hands. (<420716>Luke 7:16) Thus I am driven into a corner and must concede, even against my will, that "take" means not only to receive with the hands, but to convey to myself in any other way in which it can be done. So you see, dear friends, we must be on firm ground, if we are to withstand the devil's attack. Although I must acknowledge that you committed no sin when you touched the sacrament with your hands, nevertheless I must tell you that it was not a good work, because it caused offense everywhere. For the universal custom is, to receive the blessed sacrament directly from the hands of the priest. Why will you not herein also serve those who are weak in the faith and abstain from your liberty? It does not help you if you do it, nor harm you if you do it not.

Therefore no new practices should be introduced, unless the Gospel has first been thoroughly preached and understood, even as it has been with you. On this account, dear friends, let us deal

soberly and wisely in the things that pertain to God, for God will not be mocked. You may mock the saints, but with God it is vastly different. Therefore, I pray you, give up this practice.

Let us now speak of the two kinds. Although I hold that it is necessary that the sacrament should be received in both kinds, according to the institution of the Lord, nevertheless it must not be made compulsory nor a general law. We must occupy ourselves with the Word, practice it and preach it. For the result we should look entirely to the Word, and let every one have his liberty in this matter. Where that is not done, the sacrament becomes an external observance and a hypocrisy, which is just what the devil wants. But when the Word is given free course and is not bound to any observance, it takes hold of one today and falls into his heart, tomorrow it touches another, and so on. Thus quietly and soberly it will do its work, and no one will know how it all came about.

I was glad to know when some one wrote me, that some people in this city had begun to receive the sacrament in both kinds. You should have allowed it to remain thus and not have forced it into a law. But now you go at it pell-mell, and headlong force every one to it. Dear friends, you will not succeed in that way. And if you desire to be regarded as better Christians than others, by this that you take the sacrament into your hands and receive it in both kinds, you are really poor Christians indeed! In this way even a sow could be a Christian, for she has a big enough snout to receive the sacrament outwardly. We must deal soberly with such high things. Dear friends, this dare be no mockery, and if you would heed me, give it up. If you will not heed me, no one need drive me away from you — I will leave you unbidden, and I shall regret that I ever preached so much as one sermon in this place. The other things could be passed by, but this cannot be passed by; you have gone so far that men say: “At Wittenberg there are very good Christians, for they take the sacrament with the hands and handle the cup, and then they go to their brandy and drink until they are drunken.” Thus are the weak and simple-minded men driven away, who would come to us if as much instruction had been given to them as was given to us.

But if there is any one so stupid that he must touch the sacrament with his hands, let him have it brought home to his house and there let him handle it to his heart's content. But in public let him abstain, since that will not bring him harm and the offense will be avoided which is caused to our brothers, sisters and neighbors, who are now so angry with us that they are ready to kill us. I may say that none of the enemies who have opposed me until now have brought so much grief upon me as you.

This is enough for today; we shall continue on the morrow.

THE SIXTH SERMON

FRIDAY AFTER INVOCAVIT

In our discussion of the chief things we have come to the reception of the sacrament, which we have not yet finished. Today We shall see how we must conduct ourselves here, and also who is worthy to receive the sacrament and who belongs there.

It is very necessary here that your hearts and consciences be well instructed, so that you distinguish well between the outward reception and the inner and spiritual reception. This is the bodily and outward reception, when a man receives with his mouth the body of Christ and His blood. Any man

can receive the sacrament in this way, for such reception may be without faith and love. But that reception does not make a man a Christian, for if it did, even a mouse would be a Christian, for it can likewise eat the bread and drink out of the cup. It is such a simple thing to do. But the true, inner, spiritual reception is a very different thing, for it consists in the right use of the sacrament and of its fruits.

I would say in the first place that such reception is the true inner one, and is a reception in faith. We Christians have no other outward sign by which we may be distinguished from others than this sacrament and baptism; but a mere outward reception, without faith, amounts to nothing. There must be faith to make one well prepared for the reception and acceptable before God, otherwise it is all sham and a mere external show, which is not Christianity at all. Christianity is a thing of faith, which is never bound to any external work.

But faith (which we all must have, if we wish to go to the sacrament worthily) is a firm trust, that Christ, the Son of God, stands in our place and has taken all our sins upon His shoulders, that He is the eternal satisfaction for our sin and reconciles us with God the Father. He who has this faith belongs to this sacrament, and neither devil nor hell nor sin can harm him. Do you ask why? Because God is his protector and defender. And when I have this faith, then I am certain God is fighting for me; I can defy devil, death, hell and sin and all the harm with which they threaten me. This is the great, inestimable treasure given us in Christ, which the words of man fail to describe. Only faith can take hold of the heart, and not every one has such faith. Therefore this sacrament must not be made a law, as the most holy father, the pope, has done with his fools' commandment: All Christians must go to the sacrament at the holy Eastertide, and he who does not go shall not be buried in consecrated ground. FB69 Is it not a foolish law which the pope has set up? You ask why? Because we are not all alike; we do not all have equal faith; the faith of one is stronger than that of another. It is therefore impossible that the sacrament can be made a law, and the greatest sins are committed at Easter solely on account of this unchristian command, which would drive everybody to the sacrament. And if all robbery, usury, unchastity and all the other sins were cast upon one great heap, this sin would overtop it — even at the time and place of seeming greatest holiness. And why? Because the pope can look into no one's heart to see whether he has faith or not.

But if you believe that God is with you and stakes all his treasures and His blood for you, as if He said: Fall in behind Me without fear or delay, and then let come what may to attempt thy harm, let devil, death, sin and hell and all creation try it, I shall go before thee, for I will be thy captain and thy shield, trust Me and rely upon Me completely — he who believes thus cannot be harmed by devil, hell, sin or death; if God fights for him, what can you do to him?

He who has such faith is fit for the altar and receives the sacrament as an assurance, or seal, or sign to assure him of God's promises and grace. But such faith we do not all have; would to God one-tenth of the Christians had it! See, such rich, immeasurable treasures, which God in His grace showers upon us, cannot be the possession of every one, but only of those who suffer either bodily or spiritual adversity: the bodily through the persecution of man, and the spiritual by despair of conscience; outwardly or inwardly, when the devil causes your heart to be weak, timid and discouraged, so that you know not how you stand with God, and when he reproaches you with your sins. And in such terrified and trembling hearts alone God desires to dwell, as the prophet Isaiah says. (<236602>Isaiah 66:2) For he who has not felt the battle within him, is not distressed by his sins nor

has a daily quarrel with them, and wishes no protector, defender and shield to stand before him, is not yet ready for this food. This food demands a hungering and longing man, for it delights to enter a hungering soul, one that is in constant battle with its sins and eager to be rid of them.

He who is not thus prepared should abstain for a while from this sacrament, for this food is not for a sated and full heart, and if it comes to such, it is harmful. Therefore, if we think upon, and feel within us, such distress of conscience and the fear of a timid heart, we shall come with all humbleness and reverence, and not rush to it pell-mell, with insolence and without fear and humility. We are not always fit for it; today I have the grace, and am fit for it, but not tomorrow, yea, it may be that for six months I have no desire nor fitness for it.

Therefore are they the most worthy who are constantly vexed by death and the devil, and they receive it most opportunely, to remind them and strengthen them in the faith that no harm can come unto them, for He is now with them, from Whom no one can take them away; let come death or devil or sin, they cannot do them harm.

This is what Christ did, when He prepared to institute the blessed sacrament. He brought anguish upon His disciples and trembling to their hearts when He said that He would go away from them, (<402602>Matthew 26:2) and again they were tormented when He said: One of you shall betray me. (<402621>Matthew 26:21) Think you not that that cut them to the heart? Truly, they received the word with all fear, and sat there as though they were all traitors to God. And after He had made them all tremble with fear and sorrow, then only did He institute the blessed sacrament as a comfort, and consoled them again. For this bread is a comfort for the sorrowing, a healing for the sick, a life for the dying, a food for all the hungry, and a rich treasure for all the poor and needy.

Let this be enough at this time concerning the proper use of this sacrament. I commend you to God.

THE SEVENTH SERMON

SATURDAY BEFORE REMINISCERE

Yesterday we heard of the use of the holy and blessed sacrament and saw who are worthy to receive it, even those in whom is the fear of death, who have timid and despairing consciences and who live in fear of hell. All such come prepared to partake of this food for the strengthening of their weak faith and the comforting of their conscience. This is the true and right use of this sacrament, and whoever does not find himself in this state, let him refrain from coming until God also takes hold of him and draws him through His Word.

We shall now speak of the fruit of this sacrament, which is love; that is, that we should treat our neighbor even as God has treated us. Now we have received from God naught but love and favor, for Christ has pledged and given us His righteousness and everything that He has, has poured out upon us all His treasures, which no man can measure and no angel can understand or fathom, for God is a glowing furnace of love, reaching even from the earth to the heavens.

Love, I say, is a fruit of this sacrament. But I do not yet perceive it among you here in Wittenberg, although there is much preaching of love and you ought to practice it above all other things. This is the principal thing, and alone is seemly in a Christian. But no one shows eagerness for this, and you want to do all sorts of unnecessary things, which are of no account. If you do not want to show

yourselves Christians by your love, then leave the other things undone, too, for St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." (<461301>1 Corinthians 13:1) This is a terrible saying of Paul. And further: "And though, I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries of God, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing." (<461302>1 Corinthians 13:2,3) You have not got so far as that, although you have received great and rich gifts from God, especially a knowledge of the Scriptures. It is true, you have the pure Gospel and the true Word of God, but no one as yet has given his goods to the poor, no one has yet been burned, and even these things would profit nothing without love. You would take all of God's goods in the sacrament, and yet not pour them forth again in love. One will not lend the other a helping hand, no one thinks first of another, but every one looks out for himself and his own gain, seeks but his own and lets everything else go as it will, — if anybody is helped, well and good. No one looks after the poor or seeks how to help them. It is pitiful. You have heard many sermons about it and all my books are full of it and have the one purpose, to urge you to faith and love.

And if you will not love one another, God will send a great plague upon you; let this be a warning to you, for God will not reveal His Word and have it preached in vain. You are tempting God too far. My friends. If some one in times past had preached the Word to our forefathers, they would perchance have acted differently. Or if the Word were preached today to many poor children in the cloisters, they would receive it with much greater joy than you. You do not heed it at all, and give yourselves to other things, which are unnecessary and foolish.

I commend you to God.

THE EIGHTH SERMON

A SHORT SUMMARY OF THE SERMON OF DR. M. LUTHER DELIVERED ON REMINISCERE SUNDAY ON PRIVATE CONFESSION

Now we have heard all the things which ought to be considered here, except confession. Of this we shall speak now.

In the first place, There is a confession which is founded on the Scriptures; namely, when some one commits a sin publicly, or with other men's knowledge, and is accused before the congregation. If he abandons his sin, they intercede for him with God. But if he will not hear the congregation, he is excluded from the church and cast out, so that no one will have anything to do with him. And this confession is commanded by God in <401815>Matthew 18:15, "If thy brother trespass against thee (so that thou and others are offended), go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone." Of this confession there is no longer even a trace to be found, and in this particular the Gospel is put aside in this place. He who could reestablish it would perform a good work. Here is where you ought to have taken pains and reestablished this kind of confession, and let the other things go. For by this no one would have been offended, and it would have been accomplished without disturbance. It should be done in this way: When you see a usurer, adulterer, thief or drunkard, you should go to him in secret and admonish him to give up his sin. If he will not hear, you should take two others with you and admonish him once more, in a brotherly way, to give up his sin. But if he scorns that, you should tell

the pastor before the whole congregation, have your witnesses with you, and accuse him before the pastor in the presence of the people, saying: "Dear pastor, this man has done this and that, and would not receive our brotherly admonition to give up his sin. therefore I accuse him, together with my witnesses who were present." And then, if he will not give up and willingly acknowledge his guilt, the pastor should exclude him and put him under the ban before the whole assembly, for the sake of the congregation, until he comes to himself and is received back again. This would be Christian. But I cannot undertake to carry it out single-handed.

Secondly, A confession is necessary for us, when we go away in a corner by ourselves, and confess to God Himself and pour out before Him all our faults. And this confession is also commanded. From this comes the familiar word of Scripture: "Facite iudicium et iustitiam." (<011819>Genesis 18:19) *Judicium facere est nos ipsos accusare et damnare; iustitiam autem facere est fidere misericordiae Dei.* FB72 As it is written, "Blessed are they that keep judgment and do righteousness at all times." (<19A603>Psalm 106:3) The judgment is nothing else than a man's knowing and judging and condemning himself, and this is true humility and self-abasement. The righteousness is nothing else than a man's knowing himself and praying to God for the mercy and help through which God raises him up again. This is what David means when he says: "I have sinned; I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord," (<193205>Psalm 32:5 f.) and, "Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin; for this all Thy saints shall pray 'unto Thee."

Thirdly, There is also a confession when one takes another aside, and tells him what troubles him, so that he may hear from him a word of comfort; and this confession is commanded by the pope. It is this urging and forcing which I condemned when I wrote concerning confession, FB73 and I refuse to go to confession just because the pope wishes it and has commanded it. For I wish him to keep his hands off the confession and not make of it a compulsion or command, which he has not the power to do. Yet I will let no man take private confession away from me, and I would not give it up for all the treasures in the world, since I know what comfort and strength it has given me. No one knows what it can do for him except one who has struggled much with the devil. Yea, the devil would have slain me long ago, if the confession had not sustained me. For there are many doubts which a man cannot resolve by himself, and so he takes a brother aside and tells him his trouble. What harm is there, if he humbles himself a little before his neighbor, puts himself to shame, looks for a word of comfort from him, and takes it to himself and believes it, as if he heard it from God himself, as we read in <401819>Matthew 18:19 "If two of you shall agree as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them."

And we must have many absolutions, so that we may strengthen our timid consciences and despairing hearts against the devil and against God. (Many Absolutions) Therefore no man shall forbid the confession nor keep or drive any one away from it. And if any one wrestles with his sins, is eager to be rid of them and looks for some assurance from the Scriptures, let him go and confess to another in secret, and receive what is said to him there as if it came directly from God's own lips. Whoever has the strong and firm faith that his sins are forgiven, may ignore this confession and confess to God alone. But how many have such a strong faith? Therefore, as I have said, I will not let this private confession be taken from me. Yet I would force no one to it, but leave the matter to every one's free will.

For our God is not so miserly that He has left us with only one comfort or strengthening for our conscience, or one absolution, but we have many absolutions in the Gospel, and are showered richly with them. For instance, we have this in the Gospel: "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." (<400614>Matthew 6:14) Another comfort we have in the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses," etc. (<400612>Matthew 6:12) A third is our baptism, when I reason thus: See, my Lord, I am baptized in Thy name so that I may be assured of Thy grace and mercy. After that we have the private confession, when I go and receive a sure absolution as if God Himself spake it, so that I may be assured that my sins are forgiven. Finally I take to myself the blessed sacrament, when I eat His body and drink His blood as a sign that I am rid of my sins and God has freed me from all my frailties; and in order to make me sure of this, He gives me His body to eat and His blood to drink, so that I shall not and cannot despair: I cannot doubt I have a gracious God.

Thus we see that confession must not be despised, but that it is a true comfort. And since we need many absolutions and comforts, because we must fight against the devil, death, hell and sin, we must not allow any of our weapons to be taken away, but keep intact the whole armor and equipment which God has given us for use against our enemies. For you do not yet know what work it is to fight with the devil and to overcome him. I know it well; I have eaten salt with him once or twice. I know him well, and he knows me well, too. If only you knew him, you would not in this manner drive out confession.

I commend you to God. Amen.